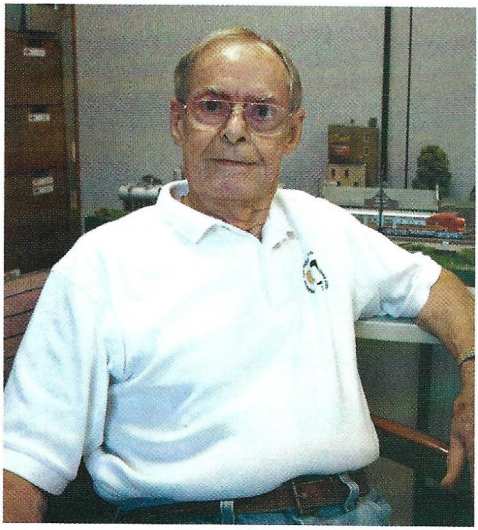

FLOYD BRITTIAN EARNS MMR # 435

From Ground Zero to MMR

It seems that I have little in common with many of the previous 434 individuals earning their MMR with their lifetime interest in all forms of railroading. Yes, early on a Lionel 027 train set was under the tree one Christmas morning. I recall later trading it for some S gauge and that for some HO rolling stock. All that remains from that era are four American Flyer cast metal tank cars, recently repainted and now on my layout as a weed spraying consist.

As life proceeded, along came school, employment, marriage, children, a job change, relocation, and many other diversions with interest in model railroading at the bottom of things to do.

The interest was revived in the mid-1980s, as life became more stable. A recently vacated upstairs bedroom attracted my attention and with the approval of my spouse, a decision was made to try my hand at constructing a model railroad.

It all sounded so simple. I was yet to discover just how steep the learning curve was to overcome. As I look back, each false start was a step up that curve. One of my major mistakes was not thinking things through, researching and planning far ahead of laying the first rail. I did not despair, and although it took a while, everything came together in the end.

For reasons I can't recall, the Monon — a road I knew nothing about nor had ever researched — was selected as the basis of layout No. 1. At that time, Homasote was in vogue so it was my choice for a base, upon which I hand-laid track on wood ties using a Kadee rail spiker. You can visualize the results of what changing temperature and humidity did to it. Disaster would be a mild description. My second attempt did not turn out much better. It was evident that I had much to learn.

I built a new home in 1992, dedicating a 20x46-foot space in the lower level for my train room and built my third layout, again without proper research. A local unnamed model railroad guru looked it over and dubbed it a "spaghetti bowl." He was correct; it had no beginning, no end, and no purpose.

I joined a local model railroad club, dismantled my home layout, and sold much of my equipment. Another lesson was learned here: Never sell anything because you may regret it later. The club venture did not work out for me. I did learn, however, that the three things the previous layouts lacked

had to be incorporated in any new railroad endeavor.

So, I found myself with an empty basement room and little equipment. I had to start over, having gained experience from previous mistakes. This time I did do my research, selecting a railroad in an area of the country I knew something about and designed a point-to-point track plan based on prototypical railroad operations (ProRail). I also made the choice to move to a wireless DCC system for train control.

My new layout was to be the Midland Valley Railroad in Oklahoma. I used Lloyd E. Stagners' book, *Midland Valley Rails for Coal, Cattle & Crude* (now out of print) and the photo archives of Charlie Winters as references. I was able to design a workable track plan reflecting the prototype. I also had decals made, which allowed me to paint the motive power in the correct color scheme. MV was essentially a flat river level road following the Arkansas River. Using hollow core doors as a surface, the benchwork was constructed in about two weeks. This required considerably more time to create, but the work required to build the base for the new railroad earned my first six AP Certificates.

The spaghetti bowl commenter approved of my new approach and all is now well with the world. My compliments to those who theorized about moving prototypical operation to model form. Having had the opportunity to operate on many layouts in cities across the country and having many of those same people operate the Midland Valley is an education in itself. The hobby has been good both to me and for me.

I suggest that anyone aspiring to earn their MMR that the two most difficult awards to earn are volunteer and author. Start on those early while building your layout because writing and volunteering will take some time. I failed to realize how much time those two categories would take and only after my layout was completed and judged did I decide to go for my MMR.

A slide show of my Midland Valley can be viewed at www.corbu.us/brittian as photographed and posted by Mike O'Brien of Pasadena, California.

Floyd has earned the following certificates: Master Builder–Cars, Master Builder–Scenery, Master Builder–Structures, Master Builder–Prototype Model, Model Railroad Engineer–Electrical, Model Railroad Engineer –Civil, and Association Volunteer.